



# **PRISM**

**1985**



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PRISM



Fern prints: Angela Waldrop

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## Special Credits

Cover Design: Sheila Davis  
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Judges: Dr. Anne Fountain  
Mrs. Janet Wester  
Mrs. Judy Williams

## Judging Policy

Entries to the Prism competition are judged on creativity of language, originality and beauty of expression, and literary technique. Prizes are awarded, not on the basis of a single work, but on the average score of an individual's total entries.

## WHEN THE LIQUOR TALKS

Friday night,

And the first hours of Saturday  
will come dragging you in  
like some mud-strewn puppy.  
You'll be quiet at first,  
Tiptoeing, but knocking into everything.  
You'll run into the wash stand, and cuss,  
And I'll pretend I'm asleep  
Pretend I haven't heard you come in,  
Pretend I haven't laid here for hours  
Dreading hearing you come through that door.  
I'll pretend, but you'll lean over me--  
Rot-gut whiskey nigh to choking me--  
And say, "Hell-o-o."  
I'll move a little, or mumble,  
like I'm still asleep,  
hoping you'll mutter and leave me be;  
But you'll poke your finger in my side,  
poke in my damn sore ribs  
Till I answer you something.  
You'll be all sweet, closest to loving you ever get.  
You'll want what I can't give,  
I'll never let you anymore.  
I'll lay there like I'm dead, wishing it was over,  
Wishing my life was over  
Wishing I could talk to the god what put me here,  
Stuck me here in this holler  
Where there ain't but one road in and only one way out.

There's just one road into Fletcher's Hollow,  
One pot-holed, gully-washed road.  
Down that road a piece, there's a wider road,  
Not used near as much now.  
The sign says, "Richmond Mining Company,"  
--that's what you told me, Jules--  
The lettering's fancy and black,  
--Everything's black in Fletcher's Hollow:  
Dirt; Dresses; Lungs.  
There's only one way out of this place.

Caleb found that way out, and Macon, too.  
My brothers didn't have to wait for Black Lung;  
Both of them got caught in that big cave-in  
Buried under black dust, thicker than sin.  
I was there soon as I heard they were trapped,  
I could hear their voices, muffled, tired;  
Two days I sat there, hoping the workers could dig through.  
The third day the shaft grumbled,  
heaved and pitched.  
Two more days of digging, and I buried them.  
Black dirt, Black dress, Black tears.

That was when you come, Jules,  
    come riding down that gully-washed road.  
You saw me doing wash down by Miller's Branch,  
    dipping gray-white shirts in a dingy stream.  
You told me such stories, told me about Danville,  
    How folks dressed fancy and wore feathered hats,  
    Told me you'd take me, show me all that,  
    But you never did.  
You grew roots in this black hill,  
    Roots that draw your blood,  
    Suck your life into this mining land.

Jules, how come you came down that road,  
    Sitting so high on a mule like Jesus?  
I thought sure you'd take me outta here.  
    But no, you liked the hills, you said.  
    Too many people in Danville, you said.  
    Steady work in the mines you said.  
Well, the mine closed, Jules,  
    Three months back.  
When you going to come outta your corn liquor dreams  
    And take us away from here?

The moon's over the ridge, shining through the cracked glass.  
    I burrow myself deeper into the patched quilts.  
It's midnight, or thereabouts.  
    You'll be here in a while.  
Jules, tell me what's on yon side of that ridge.  
    Tell me about the gingerbread houses and fancy dressers.  
    Tell me, Jules,  
    Sometimes I like it when the liquor talks.

Lisa Cook

## NAKED

Yes, I see you  
With the same eyes that saw you laugh  
saw you weep  
saw you angry  
saw you weak.

I see your eyes reaching for me  
Arms from the past.

Yes, I hear you  
With the same ears that heard your fears  
heard your dreams  
heard your passions  
heard your screams.

I hear your telepathic call  
From across the room.

You see me  
You see that the years have changed and cloaked my nakedness from your all knowing gaze.  
I am not the child  
not the sacrificer  
not the abandoned one.

Now you cower helpless before me.  
Your flesh slashed from your bones  
By the razor sharp edge of my all knowing gaze.

Angie Waldrop



## THE WARMING

wrinkled, round,  
fuzzy, red;  
crawls it now  
off to bed  
and sleeps it there  
by and by  
until it weaves  
a butterfly.  
tiny head  
wrinkled wings  
clumsy legs  
it slowly brings,  
struggling from its  
dry cocoon,  
to air in silent  
heat till noon.



Margaret Deem

## A TEAR FOR YOU, A TEAR FOR ME

Today I cried a tear for you  
in the darkness of my soul  
And my soul became bright  
and I smiled.  
Today I reached out for you  
from the coldness of my thoughts  
And your hand clasped mine  
and I felt warmth.  
Today I said a prayer for us  
from the bottom of my heart  
And you touched my lips  
and I knew my prayer'd been answered.  
Today I sang a song for you  
for all the world to hear  
And you listened, and to my joy,  
You cried a tear for me.

Jo Ellen Rose

## PASSION GIFT

Red,  
the blushing face  
of a rose  
who sent its love  
a kiss  
by the wee  
feet of the bee.  
Waiting silently  
for reply,  
it unwisely caught  
the gardener's eye,  
and blushing death  
was sent  
with love  
to me.

Margaret Deem

## SUNSHINE

When the light breaks through the windows,  
at the dawning of the day,  
It brightens every corner  
with each sparkling, shining ray.  
It comes without a sound at all  
And leaves the same way too.  
It lightens the mind, the heart, the soul  
With its golden, warming hue.  
No such beauty could come but from God,  
A fortress shining rare.  
Dependable as the days are long,  
Oh sun thou art so fair.  
When the light breaks through the windows  
at the ending of the day,  
I treasure every second  
in a very special way.  
For I know that light must go away  
So the moon may take its place  
And its beams will shine through the windows  
And with the shadows embrace.

Jo Ellen Rose





# TO DAWN:

There never failed to be a  
twinkle or a glimmer  
In his eyes as he said  
he wished I'd leave.  
Smiling when the thought  
crossed his mind  
That he could punch my foot  
with his cane  
When he walked by.

He was always playing loveable pranks,  
always full of apologies  
(For what he could not control)  
and always laughing because  
He weighed less than his teenage daughter!

He was full of love  
love for his two daughters,  
A special reborn love for his only son,  
and an everlasting love for his wife.  
He must have felt his heart expanding.

The sun shone brightly on him.  
And God smiled upon his life  
And helped him in his struggle  
For life or death.

Amanda Webb

# IN HER HOUSE

Plaster piled upon the  
wooden floor  
like  
fallen  
dreams,  
The smooth handrail  
she once  
held  
for  
balance,  
The fading carpet  
which once  
cushioned  
every  
step,  
Walls which once  
let the yellow  
light  
her  
face,  
Lie still behind  
the door  
without  
a  
key.

Margaret Deem

TO C.W.

My friend,  
now a neat rectangle  
of fresh brown soil  
still void of grass.

My mind can't conceive  
you might really lie  
in that horrible hole-  
pounds of dirt,  
thick and suffocating,  
holding you in  
and away from me.

I stand here above you  
emotions gripping my throat:  
confusion, sorrow, and fear.

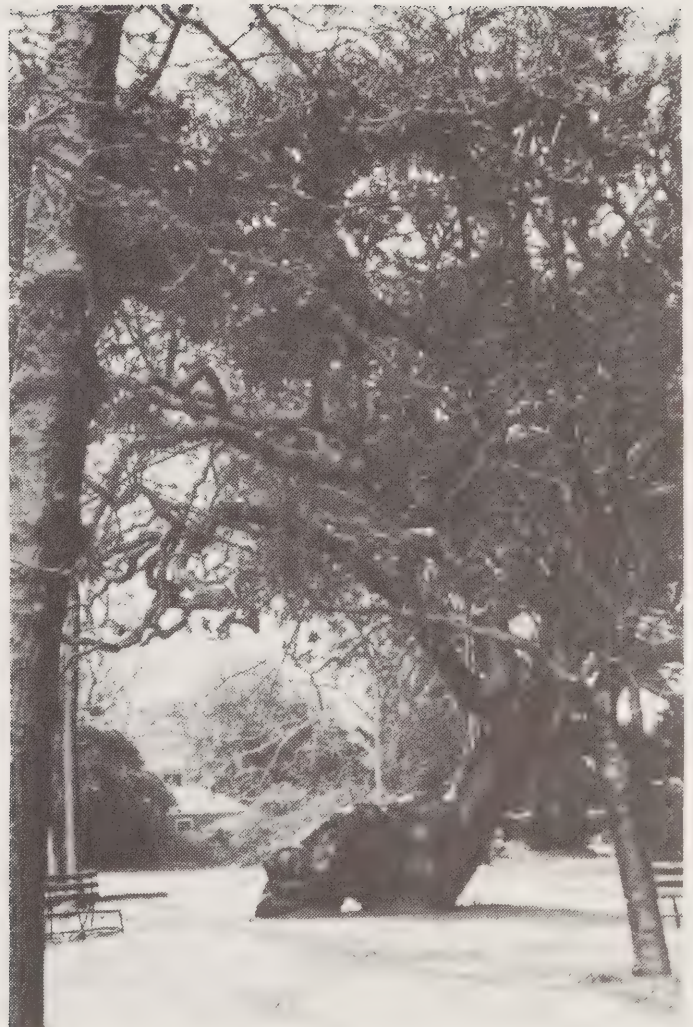
Two weeks ago  
I wouldn't have dreamt  
of asking you  
what death was like.

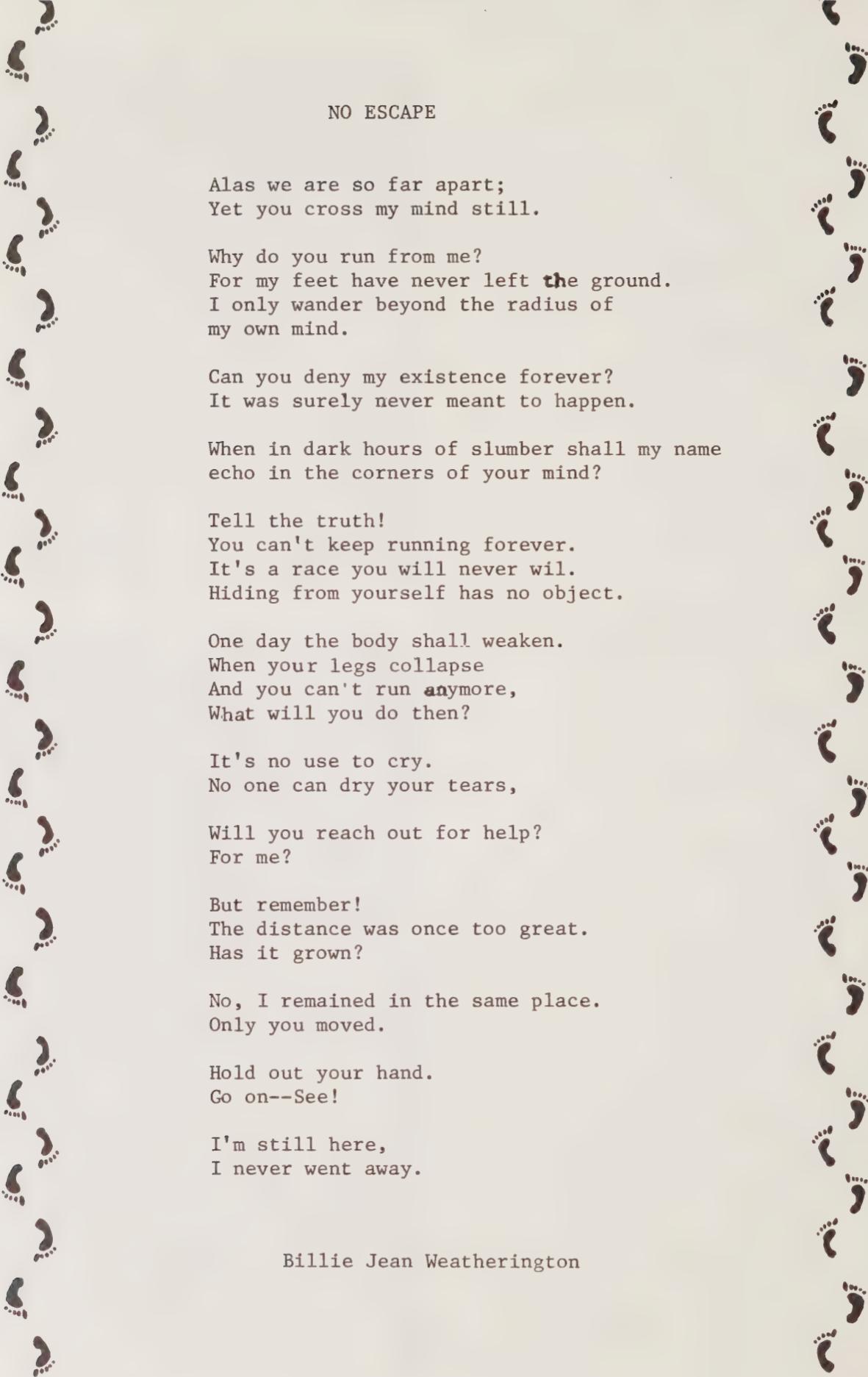
Two weeks ago  
you wouldn't have dreamt  
you'd know.

Jo Ridout

She sits, crouched low  
In the darkest corner  
Blue and purple patches  
Painted on her skin  
One long slash prevents her  
From sitting back  
Her soul bleeds  
Tears fall as  
She sobs, almost silently  
Her enraged father  
Storms through the door  
Terror streams  
Out of her eyes

Amanda Webb





NO ESCAPE

Alas we are so far apart;  
Yet you cross my mind still.

Why do you run from me?  
For my feet have never left ~~the~~ ground.  
I only wander beyond the radius of  
my own mind.

Can you deny my existence forever?  
It was surely never meant to happen.

When in dark hours of slumber shall my name  
echo in the corners of your mind?

Tell the truth!  
You can't keep running forever.  
It's a race you will never wil.  
Hiding from yourself has no object.

One day the body shall weaken.  
When your legs collapse  
And you can't run ~~anymore~~,  
What will you do then?

It's no use to cry.  
No one can dry your tears,

Will you reach out for help?  
For me?

But remember!  
The distance was once too great.  
Has it grown?

No, I remained in the same place.  
Only you moved.

Hold out your hand.  
Go on--See!

I'm still here,  
I never went away.

Billie Jean Weatherington

LOCKED IN A (LOOK) WORLD

Eye, Locked in a Look-World  
can't touch intimacies  
(she can)  
reach past  
what Eye see.  
Eye can  
(brush)  
past you  
unnoticed, she can't.  
Eye can't feel  
(your lips)  
she can.  
What is it that lets  
her touch you  
(and enter your heart)?  
If only Eye could  
reach you  
No touch--  
Look-World.  
Look, World!  
Can't you see?

Joan Davis

LOVE LOST AT SEA

The many miles we walked as one--  
Were left behind on distant shores.

A ring of laughter in our  
ears--  
Lingers with the midnight sun.

Stunning charm stole my heart--  
Yours was stolen by the sea.

A homeless heart sees no peace.  
A restless heart knows no peace.  
A broken heart finds no peace.

Billie Jean Weathington





NIGHTWATCH

Staring at the stars tonight  
    I wonder what patterns your scrap of sky  
        across the continent.  
Here, the air is clear,  
        cold,  
        penetrating.  
There, do you feel an icy stab  
    Alone in your home for two?

I hurt for you, my brother, hurt for the damned unknown.  
    She dangles the future before you  
        tempting, teasing,  
        willing you to believe.

So sure, so certain  
    You married  
    (So soon):  
    Afraid of losing  
This gem, full of fire and brilliance--  
    Is she as well a stone?--  
A diamond flashing light, turning beneath your love.  
    But what a cold luster;  
    Her warmth, only reflections,  
        never from within.

Now what of her sudden uncertainty,  
    Her unknowing, ungrowing faith?  
Steadfast in this storm, you cleave to your dreams,  
    Your hopes and plans for your lives together.

Two thousand miles apart, I keep my vigil in the tempest.  
    Inside, I rage and storm,  
        Fury for the hurt you feel.

But tonight  
    As I watch the stars over the Eastern Seaboard,  
        I can only send consolation,  
Love and prayers for your West Coast solitude.

Lisa Cook



YOU

Whenever I needed you,  
long distance was the only way.  
The times we shared together,  
disappeared quickly to our dismay.  
I wanted to share everyday with you.  
There were so many things you never knew.  
We could never get back what we lost along the way.  
I am so lonely without you.  
So many nights I cry myself to sleep.  
You are in my hopes and dreams.  
You are my light and my inspiration.  
You are my mom.

Gina Evans

GUITAR MAN

While you sat on the bed fondling your guitar,  
Toddling baby, I crawled into your guitar case,  
So pleased with myself,  
So easily, I crawled into your heart.

Years later, on nights of ominous silence,  
Unpainted anger hanging on the walls,  
From my bedroom window, I'd hear you,  
Easing away pain with melodies.  
The chords carried your wrath on the night wind.

So little did I understand then,  
So little of your solace.

Now, I, too, search for an effective outlet,  
An abyss for my outpouring of pain,  
Sitting before my desk,  
my pen pouring ink  
as my tears flow.

Oh, Daddy,

I know  
How heavy your silence,  
your burdens of uncertainty or anger

--unspoken--

words you couldn't say,  
But fitting your fingers to the frets,  
You strummed your hurt away.

Lisa Cook



OBSERVING A FRIEND

Coy Joline,  
You play your game so well.

A shame you have no boards to tread,  
But you have your stage, just the same.  
Every breathy sigh of feigned innocence--  
Just a histrionic prop.

The drama you create:  
Writer; Producer; Director;  
Star.

You twist the plot  
Scheming  
To the culminating climax  
from which you, you alone--  
the Pro-Antagonist--  
step daintily aside,  
heedless of the substance  
ground beneath your heel  
as you turn to walk away.

Your cloak of deceit billows about you,  
A finely woven mantle of ground crystal;  
With one sweeping stroke,  
You leave a trail of blood.

Lights dim; there is no curtain call;  
Exit stage  
Left.

Lisa Cook

INVADER

You are haunting  
The way you invade my thoughts;  
There are songs I hear in my mind,  
Then your face comes flashing back through;  
I can mock your arrogant walk  
recalling you walk away;  
I recall you mocking me.

Although I've tried to beat you  
at the game you play  
I've realized I can't even play this game  
with no rules, no standards.  
I suppose I never fit as  
one of the characters in your play;  
But you haunt me  
The way you invade my thoughts.

Amanda Webb

A ROSE

I smile  
I hold beauty  
in my hands.  
The rose,  
so perfect and dainty,  
nestles its splendor  
in my palm.

My eyes mist,  
and one tear falls,  
forming an oval  
of fine crystal  
on one red velvet petal.

I sigh-happy.  
As long  
as I can cry over  
sheer beauty,  
I am alive.

And when the time comes,  
When a rose holds no place  
in my heart,  
then there will be no reason  
to live-  
for the ability to love beauty  
is  
what life is all about.

Noelle Monette

PROMISES, PROMISES

If feelings could speak  
and words had meaning  
maybe I could tell  
what you mean to me.  
For all my senseless worries  
become real with you--  
But so do my deepest fantasies.  
For this, I'll never love again,  
And if you should never love me again,  
we've loved just this once  
And memories last forever.  
It's worth every tear that falls  
just to call you mine.  
I could never leave you...  
and with this thought  
I want to bind hand in hand,  
heart and heart  
'Til eternity is the present.  
And so I pledge  
my life, my all  
without hesitation or worry.  
My best friend--  
I seek your never-ending warmth.

Jo Ellen Rose

Illusions

Against the rainbowed wall of spring you stand.  
Childlike, enchanted, I am breathless before you.  
My heart a kaleidoscope of hopes.  
Your promises a painter's palette,  
Full of pinks that lift my blues,  
And yellows that brighten my grays.  
Each mysterious hue calls my name.  
But even fools know rainbows are only visions made of vapors.  
Like the heart's prismatic illusions of love.

Angela Waldrop

THE ESSENCE OF COLERIDGE

A whippoorwill,  
    only one--  
with wings above the water  
did, while he wove  
a wondrous way,  
keep singing for his mother.  
He flapped and flew  
    flighty free  
without a hope in sight  
    but continued cooing  
    constantly wooing  
above the water white.  
    Softly sailing  
    Never failing  
Day is almost gone.  
Sun is setting.  
Little birdie is fretting  
For he is all alone.

Jo Ellen Rose

MORNING SONG

Gray slices through the blinds  
    and creeps across the carpet  
    nibbling the dust ruffle's edge.  
  
It strokes my brow to wake me  
    till I answer with open eyes  
    and find you still in sleep.  
  
A smile plays on your lips;  
Your eyes flit quickly to catch  
    some sleepy vision--  
    a vestige of the night passed.  
  
Awake, your arms embrace me,  
    The warmest blanket I know;  
Your shoulder cradles my head.  
  
Entwined in the pink-rose dawn  
Loving without words  
The sweet amen of morning.

Lisa Cook

A Dedication

One solitary red rose drifts endlessly  
    upon the waters on the fountain  
    standing proudly in front of Main -  
Each is a symbol of the past and of traditions -  
Each is a symbol of the future.  
Graduation comes and friends part  
But two symbols remain in their hearts -  
A black onyx ring and a long stem  
    red rose drifting in a fountain of  
    dreams.

Dana Watson



GOD'S HOUSE

When slanted shadows touch the stained-glass panes  
And shade of evening seepens into dusk  
Gray shadows cover church and passing lanes  
With mystic message. Now the empty husk  
Of wood and labored hours is imbued  
With beauty constantly enshrined in space  
Its great majestic outline subdued  
To fading shadows. In that beloved place  
Changing colors that rival those of dawn  
Tremble in silence, waiting humble prayer  
Waiting for those of whom he calls his own,  
And in quiet moments rest in peace there.

Through long flowing aisles faint echoes fall  
While ever so sweetly, we hear God call.

Joan Davis



## EMPTINESS

A cosmic horn plays  
                                silence;  
Deep black falls over  
                                me,  
And I stare back  
       At the white eyes of  
                                infinity.  
For one moment  
Infinity  
            and  
            I  
Understand each other.

Margaret Deem

### FILLING IN THE GAPS

Peering beyond the panes into the gray mists of morning,  
I stare at nothing,  
The pain in my chest--  
strident anger unexpressed--  
hurts hammering to be freed.  
What does one do when one is left with no choice?

I cannot evade your tangible absence:  
the floor is free of laundry,  
the bathroom sink devoid of hair and foam,  
only one breakfast plate to wash.  
What does one do with this unclaimed time?

Turning from the window and facing ~~out~~ my bedroom,  
I open the closet, gaping now,  
half empty/ half full.  
How does one fill the empty spaces left behind?

I shall learn, in time.

Lisa Cook

### NECKLACE

Thirty-five beads placed on a  
delicate chain,  
Their golden brilliance resting  
next to glowing onyx.  
Each little bead added with  
love--A love no one could  
surpass at the time.  
Overflowing emotion symbolized  
around her neck.  
An endless circle, eternal  
bond.  
She sat gazing, memories  
of the past recalled.  
Absently reaching up to  
check if her priceless treasure  
was still there.  
Yes, the necklace remained;  
Yet, it held no more that same brilliance.  
The love had been lost.

Billie Jean Weathington



## GIDDY

Oh goodness, what more could I want;  
I'm to be a debutante!  
Oh, Mother, I've not a thing to wear;  
We must do something with my hair.  
Thank goodness for cotillion class;  
See, Dad, it's worthwhile at last.  
In dresses stiff with ruffled rows,  
Sashes tied in puffy bows,  
And shoes and gloves that match just right,  
Oh won't I be a stunning sight!  
My escort will be grand as well,  
Immaculate in his coat and tails.  
Darling, delightful, dear little me,  
I'll sashay into society.

Lisa Cook

Her soft pink gown swished  
as she tried desperately  
to rush about.  
She worried,  
Will the bottom get dirty  
from dragging across the floor?  
She scattered make-up  
bottles, cases, brushes, files  
pencils, tubes and combs.  
She took the rollers out of her  
shoulder-length hair.  
Damn.  
She fussed for over an hour.  
Picking, pulling, curling, combing.  
She sprayed.  
nail dryer, hair spray, perfume.  
And then she waited nervously.  
The doorbell rang.  
Her palms turned pink and began to sweat.  
She pulled her cloak out of the closet.  
He told her she looked smashing.  
He pinned her flower on her,  
And she the same.  
As they ate, they chatted nervously.  
Then, he reached across the table for her hand  
and knocked her glass of red wine  
in her lap.

Amanda Webb



## Up Them Stairs

Went to church a Sunday,  
And this little old bald headed man put his arm in mine,  
And said "Tootie lemme help ye up them stairs."  
Elle they law I wouldn't about to let him help me up them stairs!  
I wouldn't hang him on my Christmas tree much less my arm.

Some people talk that I'm wrong,  
Say my old man ain't even cold in his grave yet.  
Well now I just tell you'uns,  
If'n a body's got something to say bout a person,  
And I know of them I say my piece on them too.  
Fer now truth is I ain't been single long,  
But Sam told me that if he passed on over afore me I ought to enjoy life.

Aay law, that man was a good one,  
Don't reckon I'll find another. . . like Sam,  
To walk me up them stairs.

Angela Waldrop

## JUST THINKING

Sometimes I wonder what I'm looking for in life,  
There are so many things to see.  
Or am I really searching,  
for things I do not need?  
But life doesn't offer any promises  
about the future to come.  
But we're always asking questions  
but only answering some.  
Too much time is spent thinking  
about the way things are  
But we continue wishing  
on each and ever star.  
So I continue wondering about  
the things I see  
And other times I'm wondering  
if life is looking for me.

Jo Ellen Rose



## MUSIC

Music  
The outlet to my every fear,  
My every dream.  
Oh how they laugh and scorn  
My feeble attempts  
to play and sing.  
So I sit in silence,  
Sealing my lips for fear of stares;  
Yet it is my uneasy trembling voice  
Which brings the small warmth inside,  
The smile which moves my lips,  
And the hope that keeps me going.  
Everyone makes their own music  
Their happiness...  
Let me sing and play  
'Cause my happiness  
Just happens to be  
Music.

Jo Ellen Rose

## MANDOLIN MEMORIES

Summer after suppertime  
When the chores were done,  
Setting on the front porch,  
Watch the fading sun.

Listening to my Daddy  
Sawing songs with his bow,  
Twanging handy tunes  
All us mountain kids know.

Clogging on the front porch  
With a steady beat;  
Kicking up my heels,  
Smacking at my feet.

Momma kept the rhythm  
Just a-creaking in her swing.  
Each took a part  
In the ballads we'd sing.

Daddy sang in baritone,  
Mom, soprano sweet:  
Six of us in harmony  
With "Bonaparte's Retreat."

So long ago, those tender times,  
But families spread and grow.  
Together time is hard to find  
And we stay busy, I know.

But Christmas reaches loving hands,  
Call us to the hills.  
The old house glows with candlelight  
And cedar drapes the sills.

Then Daddy takes his guitar down  
And strums the strings so light;  
Our voices rise in somber song  
With strains of "Silent Night."

I feel a tingle on my skin  
I feel it in my bones.  
Those mountain rolling melodies  
Still hold me, call me home.

Lisa Cook

## MOUNTAIN TALE

Land sakes chile, don't you know  
'Bout pretty Laura Foster and her no-'count beau?  
Rapscallion's name was Thomas Dula  
If they hadn't hanged him I sure would'a.

Bless my soul! You don't know what he done?  
Courtied Laura, then off to war he run.  
Poor young thing waited and hoped  
And when he came back they up and eloped.

But he wouldn't tell it, and neither did she.  
Didn't live together, land sakes me!  
Breaks my heart, but Lord knows it's true  
He made time with that trashy Betty Lou.

He sure was busy, 'cause on top of all that,  
He gambled and drank, that dirty rat.  
Poor Laura got pregnant, and didn't tell no-one  
But word got out 'cause she was a-showin'.

Tom couldn't do it. Wouldn't settle down.  
So he took her ridin', out west of town.  
Pushed her off the wagon, right down the hill.  
We knowed he was bad but we didn't know he'd kill.

He lit off, and almost wasn't found,  
But ended up hangin', now he's underground.  
I think he got just what he oughter,  
Wasn't no excuse for what he did to my daughter.

Karen Flora



Synapse

ONLY WORDS  
between us  
YOU and ME  
YOURS MINE

ours-  
muddled,  
unclaimed  
heap.

WORDS STRETCHED TAUT  
so sticky, we get  
caught--in--them  
TRIPPED and TRAPPED  
or  
SNAPPED!  
And things BRE/AK.

YOU and I  
Just looking across the great  
DI-VIDE  
(it's not so great!)

Why aren't WE  
in the middle?  
NOT  
THERE NOT HERE.

There used to be a bridge;  
We built it; you and me.  
You brought mortar; I brought stone.  
We built slowly, surely,  
Carefully, so it wouldn't fall.

Can we find the way?  
MEET ME  
In the Middle!

Lisa Cook

## LECKIE'S PEARLS

With my wrist I wiped the beading sweat off my forehead into the loose tendrils of hair that had escaped the once-tight bun sagging now at the back of my neck. It isn't even noon yet, and I've finished the wash after clipping this last shirt to the line. I guess finishing the wash should please me, but it doesn't. I want to keep busy today. Keeping busy will help keep by mind off things.

"Momma, Momma," Down the yard Cash's slim little three-year-old body runs toward me, "Thomas is a mean old baby."

"Anna," I holler to my oldest child, "What in heaven's name is Cash so tore up about?"

"Cash hit Thomas for messing up his dirt town." Anna replies, desperately struggling to manage a way to carry Thomas on her four-year-old hip and catch up with Cash all at the same time.

"Cash," I said sternly, bending down to him as he comes to a breathless screeching halt in front of me, "You look here at me. You're a big boy now, and I don't want to hear any more of this hitting Thomas. He is the baby. Do you hear me? I'm gonna smack your hind end next time." Sulking, Cash nodded his blonde head. His blue eyes not leaving the gaze of those, but what give them to him. He hated worse than any child not to get his way on things. "Now go on and play," I said, taking Thomas from Anna.

Satisfied with the attention, Thomas nuzzled close to my breast. He was tired and began to nap. It's funny how your young'uns can be a part of you and each of them turn out so different in personality. Anna is the most patient and quite a take-charge young'un. Why, I think she's been a little mother since the day that dark head and those deep, brown eyes come out of my womb a squinting at this world. Since she was big enough to waddle she's been playing helper to me and second Mama to Cash and Thomas. I've often thought how hard it must be for her to have the mind of what seems like an old woman trapped in a child's body. Cash is a sight though- unlike Anna, my little organizer, Cash just sits back and lets the world roll off his little, straight shoulders as long as his temper goes unstirred. But once his feathers are ruffled he bursts into a rage like a flame doused with kerosene. As for Thomas, he's just a year and a half now-but even when they're that young a mama knows her children. Thomas is probably the most spoiled of my three, and the most outgoing, too. He is a born actor and will do anything to be center stage. He loves attention better than any child I've ever seen, and he gets more than his share of praise in this family. He not only has me to make over him but Cash and Anna think he's God's greatest creation. They love him, even though it makes them mad that he wants to play and is too young to keep up.

On the porch step looking out across the yard, I just sit collecting my thoughts.

Thomas stirs and shifts his body in attempt to keep his little brown peepers open. But it is useless, and his eyes close resting his long blonde lashes atop his high cheekbones. Indian cheekbones, my momma calls them, cause most all people in the mountains somewhere down the line has Cherokee blood in them. Anna and Thomas are quiet again, working steadily water in a mason jar from the branch just below the clothes line to the dirt town that had now become a kitchen for the making of mudpies.

Looking out at the mountains I hopelessly wish I could see into the future and know what is ahead for me and my children.

Every day now the green gives way to the yellow and red that is beginning to spot the ridges that surround this Hollow. The leaves on the trees and the plants

are thick this year--that is a sign of a hard winter ahead. I guess that is as far as God lets anybody see--just far enough to prepare for what is directly in front of a person. But I reckon a body ought to be thankful for that much vision into the future and not complain cause they can't see everything.

I've seen five winters on English Fork now. Vernon moved me across the line to North Carolina just after we were married. That was in nineteen-nineteen, after the war. Things weren't so bad in the beginning between me and Vernon, but I never did love him. Then again, what did I know about love? I was just fourteen with all kinds of crazy notions about Prince Charmings and knights in shining armor. Vernon was twenty-four then--a real man of the world, but there was always something about him I just couldn't bring myself to love. The first time I ever saw him was my wedding day and that was the last time I ever saw my people again. Vernon Ledford looked enough like a knight or prince that day. He was tall with long lean muscles, brown eyes, and sharp, perfect features. He was blonde then, but now his hair has started turning brown. No wonder my young'uns are so pretty. There just ain't no having an ugly young'un with that man.

I learned right quick where my place was with Vernon. He didn't make no bones about what he expected from me. When I told him I was worried if I'd have friends in North Carolina, Vernon said I didn't need to worry about having friends; my main concerns were feeding, getting a job, keeping the house clean, having his kids and keeping them quite. Mind you, I did all of this, but after a while, I didn't care if it pleased Vernon or not cause it was rare that anything pleased him. I did it to survive and to feed my young'uns. I was one of those women who gets pregnant right off the bat.

About a month after Anna was born, I got a job as housekeeper down the creek at the Ogle's house. There really ain't no such a thing as a housekeeper in these parts, but Priscilla Ogles loves to put on airs like she is high-falutin'. She got the idea from somewheres, thank God, and asked me one Sunday after church if I was interested. Then Vernon and I moved from his Momma's place up on Panther's Creek to English Fork. I was glad to get away from Panther's Creek, for them panthers could curdle your blood and make your hair stand on end when they'd go to screaming at night. My job as housekeeper isn't that hard, and I like it cause the young'uns come with me for my few hours that I work a week. Sometimes it gets hectic, though, trying to keep my eye on the kids and do my work, too. The Ogles never had children and Perry Ogle loves kids, so it is a help to me that when he is there he likes to play with the children.

I don't get any money for keeping house; instead, Vernon and I get to live in this little gray house just down the hill from the Ogle's house. I like to call it a house, but I know it's just a shack. Anyway, at least my little gray shack is a home. I love my children, and I got plenty of space for what I need to get done. A room for my children, mine and Vernon's room, and a kitchen--with pumped-in water, I might add. Perry Ogle had that done for us last year. No one knew it, but the day they pumped the water in was my eighteenth birthday. I kind of figured that was a birthday present sent from God himself.

I dread that long walk up the hill today.

The big old house will be even less a home now. I guess Priscilla will carry on over losing "her beloved Perry" to the grave with her. Not that she really feels it. She just wants to play the martyr role so everyone can feel sorry for poor Priscilla. Priscilla Ogle is a fake and gossipy as the rest of English Fork, give or take a few folks. She probably wouldn't have one friend if it wasn't for her daddy's money. He's bought her everything all her life--right down to Perry, from what I gather. Even though people never talk about it, Perry told me himself their marriage was arranged cause of both their families' money. I think when she turned twenty-one her daddy feared she'd never find a man so he tried to buy that for her, too. I understand Perry's situation though. He felt he owed it to his parents. That is just how life is; the Bible says plain, "Honor thy

father and mother..." and that is what you're taught to do from the day you're born into the world. It all had to do with survival. A family unit had to survive, and the only way to do that is for each person to do what is expected of him. It was a smart move, the combining of Priscilla's Daddy's farm and Mr. Ogle's property. Both families have profited from the deal for the past nine years. Why, now all of English Fork, except for a few acres here and there, is legally owned by Perry Ogle. All the other families in this hollow are share-croppers. With Priscilla and Perry's marriage, the English' and the Ogle's have guaranteed that they and their kin are the lords and masters of this hollow.

I guess the gossip lines will be hot with all kinds of stories, now that Perry is gone. People probably would have gossiped sooner, but Perry wouldn't have stood for it and people were afraid to buck him. I'll make it through; mind you, if there was anything Perry Ogle taught me, it was strength of the spirit.

Perry was such a good man, and the young'uns were crazy over him. I can still see him coming across that yard with some pieces of stick candy or some oranges for the children. Sometimes, just like now, when I'd get my work done, he'd see me sitting on the porch steps; and he'd walk down to sit and talk with me, while I watched the children play. That's how we got to know each other, I guess. Very few people wanted to talk to me. Vernon and his family's gambling and drinking reputation got us and all the Ledford clan labeled quick as white trash. So I welcomed those mornings Perry and I would sit on the back porch steps and talk about everything under the sun. It was wonderful to have a friend and someone to take an interest in the young'uns. Sometimes he'd read to me. He even got me reading again myself. I wasn't as good a reader as him, but it didn't matter to him cause he knew I had to quit school in eighth grade which wasn't no big deal to anybody but me. Local school only goes as far as the eighth grade, but I always had these big, crazy dreams about going off to highschool. But dreams was all it ever was or could be. I had to work in my Daddy's tobacco fields. It wasn't long after, that Vernon saw me and paid my daddy for my hand in marriage. Perry and I used to talk about our families a lot--I reckon because our marriages were both arranged, and arranged marriages can sure leave you empty sometimes, no matter how hard you try to love the person you're married to.

I remember one day seeing Perry coming down the hill to talk on the porch. I tried to hide in the house because Vernon had come in drunk the night before and had hit me. When he was drinking, if I couldn't get away from him it wasn't unusual for him to get rowdy and mean. But I was ashamed for Perry to see. I don't know why, I just was. I'm not one to be vain, but when I stood in front of the little mirror propped on the dresser top and looked at my face, I had hoped he wouldn't come that day. The bruise around my eye looked a lot worse than it really was. It wouldn't like Vernon had beat me up or anything, he had just smacked me. Vernon had hit me a lot harder before, before I learned not to talk back to him. He had just never hit me on my face, and I bruise easy. He usually hit me somewhere that I could lie about and say I fell or the cow kicked me. But no lie could hide the swollen eye and yellowish-blue left cheek. I wanted to cry as I sat on the edge of mine and Vernon's bed holding the mirror and listening to Perry talk to Anna through the screen door. I told Anna to tell him I was sick, but he knew better. I finally had to come to the screen door, cause he wouldn't leave till I did. When I came to the door, he just looked at me a minute through the screen. I just looked at my feet. Then he opened the door and laid his big hand across the bruise on my cheek like I was china, then just whispered my name once. I never saw such pain come across a man's face before.

That was the first time he ever touched me. Sometimes when I'd go outside of my house, I could look up at the big house and see him watching. When I went

to pick berries, sometimes I'd get these eerie feelings of eyes against my back. I knew if I looked up he'd be watching from the barn. So I never looked up.

It wasn't until the day I was cleaning for Mrs. Ogle's dinner party that we ever spoke again. It was supposed to be a party for Perry's twenty-eighth birthday. But every-one including Perry--knew it was just a reason for Priscilla to get her so-called "friends" together and flaunt her money. She didn't much like giving parties on her own birthday cause she didn't like to be reminded or to remind the community she was two years older than Perry. She was in Asheville buying her party dress, and I was cleaning for the party.

I was putting some clothes in her room, when all that beautiful jewelry on her dressing table caught my eyes. Since no one was home I didn't think it would hurt to just sit down there and look at all those pretty glass beads, pearls, and rhinestones. Slowly, I put my hand out to touch the strand of pearls laying unclasped across the dresser top, when I got one of those eerie feelings like I do in the berry patch. I looked up into the mirror to see him standing in the doorway behind me.

"I wasn't stealing," I said calmly as possible laying the pearls in my hand back on the dresser, "I was just admiring.

"So was I," he smiled and ran his fingers through his jet black hair as he walked toward me. His voice sounded so calm and smooth, but I was scared to death, and I knew he felt awkward cause he always ran his hand across his hair when he felt nervous. My body flinched when he leaned over me to pick up the pearls. Only his smile made me relax and told me he wasn't angry about me being there at his wife's dressing table.

"They're pretty," I said looking in the mirror as Perry clasped the pearls around my neck. In the mirror I saw my scoop-neck, flour-sack dress and then I saw the tiny strand of pearls against my skin. Suddenly, I felt so pretty sitting there like a real lady.

"You ought to have your own pearls and beautiful things, Leckie." Perry's words flowed slowly through my mind and his voice was full of approval.

His hands slid from the pearls to my shoulders. His brown eyes never left mine as he dropped to his knees before me. I guess I should have left then, but I couldn't. Neither of us could leave. I put my arms around him and pulled him to my body, holding in tighter than I've ever held anything in my whole life.

It had been a year since all that started. I squeeze the lids of my eyes shut to help hold back tears.

Perry had so many plans for me and the young'uns. He had everything figured out for us. He was going to take me and the kids to his Aunt Marie's to live in Tennessee. He figured that would keep us safe from Vernon and the Ledfords and out of the line of fire when he came back for his divorce. Things were going to be pretty bad when people figured out what was going on between me and Perry. Perry wanted to spare us from as much talk as possible. I was just glad Vernon and I didn't have no papers to mess with. I would be too scared of Vernon to come back for a divorce. The preacher and God married me and Vernon. I think God understood better than anybody why I had to go with Perry now.

I knew instantly something had happened last night when Charles Ogle, Perry's brother, knocked on the door. I knew Perry wouldn't be coming for us tonight like we had planned. I thought maybe there was a problem with Priscilla. Maybe she had found out. I told Perry it was just a matter of time till she would find out about us. Standing in the doorway Charles looked like an older version of Perry. Charles was graying early and a few gray hairs peeked out from under his Stetson hat.

"Come in," I spoke softly and looked behind him as I closed the door just to make sure Perry wasn't out there waiting in the darkness for some reason. Charles took off his hat and sat at the kitchen table while I walked to mine and Vernon's room and put the suitcase full of mine and the kids' clothes back under the bed.

I figured I wouldn't be needing it tonight. Charles' gaze never left mine as I walked back and sat at the table. He fingered the brim of his hat uneasily so I knew it was up to me to break the silence.

"I told him Priscilla."

"It's not that, Leckie," Charles interrupted, his words were sharp and awkward. His eyes welled with tears and for a flash I knew something awful had happened, but I pushed it away as fast as it came to my mind.

"He never listened when I tried to warn him about her findind out, I."

Out of frustration, Charles slammed his hat down on the table, his eyes and his words cut sharpley into my body, "Perry is dead."

There. It had been said. Charles's face went white and my eyes wide. I just sat there feeling nothing, doing nothing, and thinking nothing. "Dead" echoed and bounced against the walls of my head suddenly giving me a headache. It was impossible and I didn't want to hear it so I shut my eyes for a minute and shoved the word "dead" as far into the back of my mind as I could. I jumped up out of panic, "Do you want some coffe, I didn't even offer you coffee. I don't know what I must be thinking."

Charles continued in that same flat voice, "You know you and the children mean the world to me, Leckie!" Charles's eyes shot a glance toward the childrens' room. "Perry loved you. I know he did, and if I can help I'll do anything." His voice drifted off for a minute as he picked his hat up off the table and started fingering the brim again. "Don't stay here, Leckie. This is not what Perry wanted for you and the kids."

"Then he should be here, not you." I turned my back on Charles, and silence rang in my ears a few minutes. Finally, I heard Charles rise from the chair and walk to the door.

"There is still a way and still time. We're burying Perry tomorrow, but for God's sake, Leckie, don't allow his dreams for you and the kids die with him." Charles opened the door, but I didn't turn around to stop him or look at him. I just leaned against the cast iron sink and stared out of the window--the only window in this house--and I wanted to curse it cause all I could see from it was the white house on the hill in the moonlight. "I telegraphed Aunt Marie so she wouldn't be looking for you and Perry in the morning."

"She knows?"

"She's still expecting you and the kids to come. Wanting you to come." Silence rang through the room again. And I could sense that Charles had shifted his weight to leave. "Tomorrow, noon, at the bridge below Geeder English's laural thicket, I'll wait thirty minutes." With that comment he closed the door.

I just sat there all last night by the table in the kerosene lamp light till dawn peeked through the kitchen window, rolling over and over in my mind what Charles had said. I kept seeing Charles finger that Stetson hat that he had bought a few months back in Asheville. He and his family had took me and my young'uns with them to Asheville the day he had bought that hat. We had met Perry over there and had all went to the traveling circus that was in town. I had never been to Asheville or to see a traveling show before. And I couldn't get my eyes full enough of all those pretty clothes in the windows of the stores we drove by. We had picked Perry up on the corner outside one of the stores and Charles had gone in the store and bought that felt hat. The sun was hot that day and Charles had said he wasn't going to that traveling show without something to shade his head from the sun. The traveling show was the most colorful sight I'd ever seen in my life! Red, white and blue ribbons and tents where everywhere to be seen, and the music never stopped playing. The kids had the best time a eating candy and riding the rides. Perry was the biggest young'un of all. He put the kids on one ride with painted horses that bobbed up and down to music. Me and him rode on it, too, but we sat in a seat behind the horses so I could hold

Thomas. Charles and Althie, his wife, stood to the side and waved as we went around. Perry had held my hand that whole day, and I kept thinking about how folks probably thought we was married and how proud I would be to be his wife.

Perry had begged me to have my picture taken with him, but I wouldn't. I told him that it was too risky of a thing for us to even be together, much less have a picture to prove it. I knew that when Vernon got back from West Virginia with his brothers, he wasn't going to be none too happy to hear I'd went with

Charles and his family to Asheville, anyway. But I promised Perry that someday we would come back again and have our picture taken. I told him we had the rest of our lives together to get our pictures made.

Last night, as I sat there, I kept thinking how much I wished Perry and I had made that picture. I could have held it in my hands and seen for myself that we wasn't some dream I had made up. I could have seen in his eyes the love that he felt for me. The love I needed right now. I couldn't believe this was happening. I begged God to stop the pain. I felt as if an aching hole had been knocked in the center of my breast, and the wind could blow right through me. This was the first time since I had known Perry that he had not been here when I needed him and I needed him now more than I ever had before.

"Oh, God," I prayed over and over, "please wake me up from this nightmare!"

Thomas whimpers a little in his sleep and pulls me from my thoughts back to the here and now. Sitting on the porch step looking out across the yard. Vernon will be back soon. When he stays out all night in town, he is usually home by noon the next morning. Thank God for small favors. I haven't had to deal with Vernon-yet.

The eleven-thirty sun shining in Thomas' eyes, so I get up and carry him in the house. Putting him down on Anna's bed and placing pillows around his little body, I can't help but hope my young'uns take after me. I'll die if either of my boys or my girl turn out like Vernon. I wonder how Vernon will deal with all this. Probably won't phase him unless the rumors get so obvious he believes them, then there won't be no dealing with him. At least by the time he gets in today, I'll be up at the Ogles cleaning.

I brush and fix my hair in front of the small mirror propped on the dresser top. I've not shed one tear, the wash is done, the house is clean, and the children are happy. Suddenly I feel so tired. From in the back of the drawer I take out my hidden box of pearls and clasp them around my neck. For a few moments I shut my eyes and I'm back in Mrs. Ogle's dressing room again. I can smell Perry's hair and skin mixed with the smell of autumn earth and sun once again.

Slowly I turn and walk out on the porch.

"Anna, Cash," I call, "you'uns come inside a minute."

Cash and Anna run a race up the yard toward the house and I step inside to wet a rag to wash ~~them~~ off with before we leave. With the suitcase in one hand, Thomas on my hip, and Cash and Anna following close behind me we walk down the creek bank toward the crossing below Geeder English's laurel thicket. Anna doesn't say a word as she leads Cash along, discouraging him from wanting to pick up rocks along the creek bank. I know Charles will be watching for me to come by way of the creek instead of the road. It is noon now, and the sun is beating straight down on us from the cloudless sky. We'll have to hurry to make it to the bridge before Charles leaves, but we will make it. I won't let Perry's dreams die with him.

Angela Waldrop

## A PEACEFUL AWAKENING

Jesse stared blankly at the sanitary white ceiling above him. Unable to find anything to interest him, he looked out the dirty window, each pane collecting frost. Across the front lawn, wounded soldiers lay moaning, begging for relief from their fresh wounds and from the freezing rain. It was nearly dusk, and sleet had been falling for about thirty minutes. Icicles were forming on the sign "Peace Institute" directly in front of his window.

A legless man lying beneath the sign caught Jesse's full attention. Two orderlies were lifting him onto a stretcher to carry him to the fourth floor, the morgue, for him to die. All of the chilling screams issued from the fourth floor.

"He'll die before sunrise" Jesse mumbled to himself. He refocused his eyes on the sign as if he were trying to gain strength from the simple words. Ironically though, the more he concentrated on the words, the more restless he became.

Jesse's eyes began to scan his "hospital room". Actually, this was a tiny office for a professor of this tiny college for women. Not farm girls like he was used to associating with, but for the daughters of prominent Southern men. Probably lawyers, senators, bankers, and plantation owners. Certainly no one from his hometown of Kinston would ever go here. He knew this was an office by the diploma and Bachelor of Arts degree hanging across from his bed. "A lot of use they'd have in a tobacco field back home," Jesse remarked. He was not impressed.

But then he didn't want to be impressed. He was mad. Mad at his father for making him leave; mad at that stupid Yankee who shot his right leg off; mad at this senseless war that was ruining his life; and mad most of all at the people who didn't even take him to a real hospital, he was brought to a surrogate hospital instead.

Jesse's eyes were feeling heavy again from the medication he had been given.

"Aren't you proud to be a North Carolinian? Don't you love the South? I thought I raised you to respect our land--Davis land! The Davis family has lived on this farm for over a hundred years and I don't want to lose it to any undeserving Yankees! If you won't fight for the Confederate States of OUR America then I don't want you in my house or on my land!"

"I do love our land! My dream is to carry on the family tradition and raise my children here after you and ma die! I just want to be able to live long enough to start a family! I'm only seventeen! I'm not old enough to fight against other guys my age! We don't even have to fight, the Yankees aren't coming anywhere near Kinston or our farm! Besides, what if something happened to me--what would you and ma do? What would Hope do?"

"Get out of my house! Get off my land! You aren't a true Southerner! You aren't even a true Davis! You don't come back unless you are wearing a gray uniform, a man's uniform!"

Jesse ran out of the door. He would go over to Hope's house. Maybe he could sleep in their barn for a few days until his Dad cooled down. The Town of Kinston was two miles from the Davis farm, but he had discovered a shortcut through the woods and through some cleared land that was the quickest way. He found the familiar path and started the mile-and-a-half walk through the woods. He thought he heard shots, but he just figured it was his imagination.

He was almost to the cleared land when three men jumped out of the bushes and pointed guns at him. "You a Yankee or a Rebel?" "What are you doing in this area alone?" "Where are you from?" All three were blaring questions

at once, so Jesse, with a frightened look on his face, told them the truth. When he realized they didn't believe him and thought he was a Yankee spy, he fabricated a story.

"I was with my company but we had to retreat into a town. I ran as fast as I could. I was afraid to wear my gray clothes around so many Yankees, so I stole some clothes from a farm about a mile back."

"Well, boy," the tallest said, "if you are telling the truth about being a lost Rebel, then we'll give you some more clothes and you can just become a member of our company." They led Jesse over to where the rest of their company was hiding. The tallest explained the situation to the sargeant who then went over to a dead soldier lying on the ground. He took the gray, blood-stained shirt and pants off of the unfortunate Rebel and threw them to Jesse. "Put these on," he growled.

Jesse got dressed in his "man's" uniform. There were blood stains and two bullet holes: one in the stomach and one just under the left shoulder. The stench was about to make him sick when shots rang out.

"Grab your guns and get out there." Orders barked out of the darkness. Someone nudged Jesse, "You're front line, Go!" Jesse ran out into the clearing but stood motionless, like an alerted, frightened deer, instead of shooting at invisible foes.

Jesse heard a noise that sounded like it was right beside him. He was paralyzed with fear, his heart was galloping in his chest. Suddenly his right knee buckled and he sank into the wet grass.

Jesse jumped and woke himself. Sweat was trickling off his forehead and neck, saturating his feather pillow. His first thought was that it was his Dad's fault. He looked down at the empty space left beside his left leg. He remembered the legless man now occupying a table on the fourth floor. Jesse Davis' eyes welled with tears. He could now be thankful for his life and his remaining leg. Sure he could no longer ride a horse, but with the aid of a crutch, he could plant. He'd be slow, but still effective. He called for the roaming chaplain.

"Could you tell my father that I'm okay and I'm sorry and I love him."

"Of course, son," the gentle chaplain replied. He left the room.

Jesse thought back on the events of the past couple of days. He glanced back out of the window. Because of the darkness, he could barely see the sign but he could make out the word "Peace". A slight smile graces his countenance. It was a peaceful awakening.

Donna Edwards

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The Prism staff would like to thank everyone who has contributed to our efforts in producing this magazine and holding Cider House last Fall.

Thanks are also due to the judges for sacrificing their considerable time to read and score the many entries to this year's Prism.

For their graphic design submissions, Prism staff thanks Ms. Parker's art classes.

The most hectic time for Prism staff members is "type & paste" time. Wedging in those necessary hours among tests, review sessions, and night classes is no easy task. Thanks, from the editors, to the dedicated members of our staff who found this necessary time, and also to certain non-members. Patricia Glancy and Margaret Mahoney, thanks for lending your typing skills to our meager efforts. Thanks also to Michael Mizelle and Randy Clark for your assistance on "paste-up night."

Finally, the staff would like to thank Dr. Jean Bauso for her dedication, patience, guidance, and friendship. We have enjoyed working with such a warm and personable sponsor. Thanks!



